

To: Russo, Rebecca[Russo.Rebecca@epa.gov]
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WATER POLLUTION:

Utah lawmakers say EPA spilled mine sludge on purpose

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Two Utah lawmakers want the state's attorney general to investigate whether federal officials purposely caused a Colorado mine release that sent 3 million gallons of toxic sludge into a tributary of the San Juan River.

Attorney General Sean Reyes (R) was briefing the Utah Water Development Commission yesterday when state Sen. Margaret Dayton (R) asked whether U.S. EPA may have breached the Gold King mine to justify a Superfund designation for the site.

State Rep. Mike Noel (R) added that EPA may have caused the release in order to aid environmentalists who want to put a halt to mining.

Though neither lawmaker offered evidence to support their claims, Reyes said he would look into the matter when he meets EPA officials at the Gold King mine today to assess the damage.

Environmental groups quickly blasted the lawmakers' comments as absurd conspiracy theories.

Zach Frankel, the executive director of the Utah Rivers Council, said he faulted EPA for responding slowly to the spill but isn't worried the agency secretly wanted the toxic leak.

"To deliberately cause this would not only violate the Clean Water Act, there would be a whole set of criminal charges that could be filed," Frankel said (Brian Maffly, [Salt Lake Tribune](#), Aug. 18). -- SP

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122 C St. NW, Ste. 722, Wash., D.C. 20001
Phone: 202-628-6500 Fax: 202-737-5299
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